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ABSTRACT

This study examined: (1) the current level and quality of participation by students with disabilities in the Individualized Education Program (IEP)/transition planning process and annual meetings; (2) the extent to which teachers expect and enable special education students to participate in that process; and (3) factors that may foster or suppress the participation of students. The study gathered quantitative data from a self-report survey instrument, "IEP Questionnaire," and qualitative data from audiotaped semi-structured follow-up telephone interviews. Students (n=32) in graduate special education courses completed a 22-question survey about participants' special education students' participation in the IEP, transition planning and annual meeting process, and factors that either foster or suppress such participation. Follow-up interviews clarified survey responses with emphasis on low modal and mean responses. The study found that participating special education teachers thought that both students and teachers need training to participate effectively in the IEP/transition process; that there is a need to clarify the educator's role in facilitating active student participation; and that special education law should emphasize active student IEP participation. Appendices include the IEP questionnaire, the telephone interview protocol, the consent form, and additional comments of participants. (Contains 85 references.) (DB)

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ED 461 965

PARTICIPATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

A THESIS

Presented to

Department of Educational Psychology, Administration, and Counseling

California State University, Long Beach

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Special Education

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ABSTRACT

PARTICIPATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

By

Dianne B. Piastro

August 2000

The purpose of this study was: (1) to assess the current level and quality of students' participation in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings, (2) to investigate the extent to which teachers expect and enable special education students to participate in that process, and, using multiple methodologies, (3) to identify factors that may foster and/or suppress the participation of students in an attempt to understand the perspectives of teachers in the field.

The study gathered quantitative and qualitative data. Data analysis focused on measures of central tendency, standard deviation, and response distribution percentages, as well as content review and theme analysis.

The results of the study indicate that participating teachers think that students--as well as teachers and parents--need training to facilitate student participation, that educators would benefit if their role was more clearly defined as facilitators of active student participation, and that IDEA may need to redefine participation of students, acknowledging the multiple benefits of facilitating student participation at an early age.

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE,

HAVE APPROVED THIS THESIS

PARTICIPATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

By

Dianne B. Piastro

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August 2000

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PREFACE

My introduction to the world of disability was a gradual one. After being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at age 34, it took me several years to understand the ramifications of being disabled. The world I grew up in had devalued, excluded and perceived people with disabilities as objects of pity and charity who needed to be cured or were ignored and often hidden away. In the years that followed my diagnosis, I became aware that, though I was still the same person, people treated me differently.

After 10 years, I finally reached out and became involved in the broader disability community. People who had disabilities since childhood became my friends. From them I began to learn about disability culture, including the stigma and stereotypes historically attached to disability, much of which still exists today.

I also became aware that--before becoming disabled as an adult--my personal sense of entitlement to equal opportunities, choice and self-determination had been firmly established during childhood. That had not been my new friends' experience. This thesis was conceived based on my belief that children with disabilities deserve and need the same opportunities I had growing up. Facilitating empowerment opportunities is a goal we must strive to fulfill for all special education students today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever indebted to my Thesis Committee Chair, Dr. Jennifer Coots, an extraordinary editor whose guidance and enthusiastic endorsement of the research was extraordinarily helpful. I am everlastingly grateful for the assistance and valuable input of my Thesis Committee members, Dr. Marie Hegwer-Divita and David Sanfilippo.

Many wonderful and caring people contributed to the project from its inception: Dr. Marquita Grenot-Scheyer encouraged the initial idea, as did Penny Peterson, Gayle Fenton, Dr. Claudia Wright, and my graduate advisor Dr. Charles Kokaska; my Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, Lily Nguyen, who was behind me throughout the process; and friends and family who never seemed to tire of hearing about what I was doing. I am also grateful for the help of many others along the way: Jim Neal, who helped me construct the questionnaire for data input; Dr. Gary Greene and Dr. Marie Hegwer-Divita, who critiqued the questionnaire for content; faculty who let us ask their students about participating in the research; my niece, Lynn Cliff, who input the data for me and proofread many chapters; Jean Franklin, who handled the pilot testing of the instrument, participated in analyzing the qualitative interview data, and, along with Pam Ehlers and a research assistant from Disabled Student Services, administered the research instrument for me in classes. Thank you, thank you, thank you, one and all. Lastly, I dedicate this to my devoted canine companion/assistant, Varsity.

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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Student Participation and the Individualized Education Program

Overview of Special Education Law

A law guaranteeing the free and appropriate public education of all children in the U.S., the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, was first passed in 1975; it was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990. One of the law's main components, the Individualized Education Program (IEP), was intended as a process to unite educators, parents, and students in a team effort to plan and implement a "free appropriate public education" for each child who qualifies to receive special education services (Lovitt, Cushing & Stump, 1994; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995).

IDEA sought to define "appropriate education" through the IEP process, not by language cast in stone. The somewhat ambiguous "definition" looks first to the child and second to the means by which an appropriate education is to be provided. It allows qualified educators--not lawmakers--to determine the methods used. The regulations do, however, define "free appropriate education" for special education in terms of standards and conformity with IEP procedures. IDEA's technique for defining "appropriate," then, is to require that a process be followed, in the belief that

the process will produce an acceptable result--appropriate education (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1979, p. 116).

From the law's inception, parents have been required to be invited to attend and participate at all meetings held to develop their child's IEP. But the law has only stated that students should participate on the IEP team "whenever appropriate." The term "whenever appropriate" as related to students' participation in the IEP process has not been precisely defined in the law, its regulations, case law or the courts (Turnbull, Strickland & Brantley, 1982; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1979; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995).

A requirement for student attendance and input at meetings was first added in the IDEA Amendments of 1990. At that time, developing transition plans for assisting special education students to move from school to adulthood became mandated components of the IEP process. The type and level of support needed to facilitate a smooth transition to adult life differs according to students' individual needs. IDEA requires that a coordinated set of transition services and activities be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account each student's personal interests and preferences. These specific transition services are to be included in the IEPs of all 16-year-old students. Students are also required to be invited to attend all meetings where their transition services will be considered.

This transition mandate was expanded in the 1997 IDEA Amendments. Two new requirements were added: (1) beginning when the student is age 14 and every year thereafter, the IEP must include a statement of that student's transition service needs in his or her courses of study (i.e., AP courses or vocational education), and (2) the "age

of majority" requirement that when the student, under State law, is considered an adult rather than a "minor," the IEP must include a statement that the student has been informed of those rights, if any, which will transfer to him or her upon reaching the age of majority.

According to training materials of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP, 1997), the purpose of putting a statement of transition service needs into the IEP at age 14 was to focus attention on how the child's educational program can be planned to help the child make a successful transition to his or her goals for life after secondary school. The provision was designed to augment, and not replace, the separate provision of transition services requirement of IDEA 1990, under which children with disabilities, beginning no later than age 16, are to receive transition services including instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school objectives and, when appropriate, independent living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Outlining procedures for the transfer of parental rights to the student when he or she reaches the age of majority under State law was an enormous step forward toward empowering students as adults and encouraging them to inform themselves about and become involved in their education--particularly in planning for their future (OSEP, 1997).

Benefits of Student Participation

Having opportunities to make choices and take responsibility concerning one's needs are experiences that are helpful for living independently as an adult. Many

benefits have been noted in the literature when special education students are enabled to assume active roles in the educational decision making process. These include both overall benefits and, importantly, benefits that serve students in planning their transition from school to the future. Discussion of these two benefit areas follows.

Overall benefits of student participation. Multiple benefits from student participation have been noted: a clearer understanding of the educational program; an increased awareness that teachers are committed to them; a better understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses; insights into the importance of long-term educational planning, and, perhaps most important, the opportunity to develop self-determination and self-advocacy skills (Turnbull et al., 1982). An increasing amount of data show that students with disabilities who are involved in the development of their IEPs perform better than peers who are not involved (Aune, 1991; Lovitt et al., 1994; Peters, 1990; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1996). The literature on self-management and self-regulation indicates that students at all levels and types of disability can assume more responsibility for aspects of their educational program development and implementation beginning as early as elementary school (Realon, Favell & Lowerre 1990; Salend, 1983; Schunk, 1985; Wang & Stiles, 1976).

Upon reviewing the influence on students of having opportunities to make choices about educational activities, Kohn (1993) stated:

> The evidence to support the view that choices lead to learning is so compelling that it is frankly difficult to understand how anyone can talk about school reform without immediately addressing the question of how students can be given more say about what goes on in their classes. (p. 12)

It could be said that the transition planning component of the IEP as it was legislated in 1990 and in 1997--mandating special education students' personal input and attendance at meetings--speaks to the heart of school reform as Kohn discussed it.

Benefits in transition planning. The benefits of student involvement in the IEP transition planning process are generally acknowledged by researchers and practitioners alike (Brolin, 1995; Wehman, 1992). Research in several disciplines indicates that students who choose their activities are more motivated to perform the tasks they select (Schunk, 1985; Van Reusen & Bos, 1994). Based on such studies, noted best practices in transition planning emphasize the importance of student participation (Clark, Field, Patton, Brolin & Sitlington, 1994; Halpern, 1994; Johnson & Rusch, 1993; Kohler, DeStefano, Wermuth, Grayson & McGinty, 1994; Ianacone & Stodden, 1987).

The Realities of Student Participation

Unfortunately, there are many indications that students are not participating in the process or that, if they are attending meetings, there is not meaningful participation in decision-making (Aune, 1991; Lovitt et al., 1994; Peters, 1990; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1996). Wehman (1992) emphasized this by stating, "student input in transition developing remains the missing link in most transition programs . . . " (p. 35).

This "missing link" has been found to be characteristic of transition planning practices in the State of California. In 1996, the California Department of Education (CDE) was found to be out of compliance with transition requirements in IDEA by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

When, in 1998, OSEP did a follow-up Comprehensive Compliance Review of five school districts in California, CDE was still found to be out of compliance with IDEA §300.344 (b): Transition services participants. In its letter to the CDE, OSEP noted the section's mandate:

> (1) Under paragraph (a)(7) of this section, the public agency shall invite a student with a disability of any age to attend his or her IEP meeting if a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of –
>
> (i) The student's transition services needs under §300.347(b)(1); or
>
> (ii) The needed transition services for the student under §300.347(b)(2); or
>
> (iii) Both.
>
> (2) If the student does not attend the IEP meeting, the public agency shall take other steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered. (California's Monitoring Report, April, 1999)

In responding to OSEP's request for "concrete evidence of actions taken since the OSEP's June 1998 visit," the CDE prepared a "Status Report of Corrective Actions." Regarding the "Needed Transition Services" actions, CDE reported that they had developed and distributed a long list of training materials, videos, posters, family handbooks and regulatory guides in English and Spanish between February 1, 1999 and May 13, 1999. At that time, the State's face-to-face "Transition in the IEP" trainings were noted to have included 4,080 teachers, 34 paraprofessionals, 364 family members and 312 administrators for a total of 4,790 participants.

In a second report sent to OSEP by CDE Director of Special Education, Alice D. Parker, titled "California's Plan to Ensure Statewide Compliance," timelines and responsibilities were specifically addressed for bringing the State of California into compliance with IDEA by April 6, 2000. (California's Monitoring Report, April, 1999)

Given that California has 4,363 special education teachers, 26,910 special education paraprofessionals, 379 special education administrators, and families of 646,191 special education students, meeting that deadline will be a challenge with the training efforts noted to date.

Extent of the Problem

Unfortunately, the problem of noncompliance with transition planning mandates is not occurring only in California. Its scope is national. In a January 25, 2000, report titled "Back to school on civil rights: Advancing the federal commitment to leave no child behind," the National Council on Disability (NCD) looked at more than two decades of OSEP's monitoring records and enforcement of compliance with Part B of IDEA nationwide. In its transmittal letters to the President, the President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate, and the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, the agency declared that "Overall, NCD finds that federal efforts to enforce the law over several Administrations have been inconsistent and ineffective" (National Council on Disability [NCD], 2000).

The agency's analysis of OSEP's records relative to the IEP revealed that, between 1994-1998, 38 states (76%) had failed to ensure compliance with the transition requirement of including students in meetings or, if the student did not attend, documenting that steps had been taken to ensure that the student's preferences and interests were considered. Particularly relevant to the problem of student input was a quote from a South Carolina high school senior with a disability: "I've never been asked, 'Hey, what's your perspective? What can I do to make your education

better?' And I feel like you can ask the parents all you want, but if you really want to get down to the heart of the problem and how the students are being affected, maybe you should ask them first" (NCD, 2000, p. 107).

Multiple reasons for limited student participation have been suggested by lawmakers and researchers alike. These reasons include low expectations as well as systemically related barriers. As noted by Schrag and Ahearn (1998), the negative effects of low expectations among educators on the implementation of IDEA was declared in the Congressional Committee Reports (Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee and House Committee on Education and the Workforce), which influenced the revised purposes and strengthened contents of the IDEA Amendments of 1997:

> Title 1, Section 601(c)
> (1) Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.
> (2) Since the enactment and implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, this Act has been successful in ensuring children with disabilities and the families of such children access to a free appropriate public education and in improving educational results for children with disabilities.
> (3) However, the implementation of this Act has been impeded by low expectations and insufficient focus on applying replicable research on proven methods of teaching and learning for children with disabilities. . . . (Schrag & Ahearn, p. ii)

Research studies have suggested that the scarcity of special education student participation is less related to students' capabilities than it is a reflection on limitations within the special education system, conditions which deny students support and opportunities for participation (Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995). These systemic limitations

would seem to indicate that much of what needs to be accomplished involves exploring educators' expectations, IEP/transition planning service delivery practices, and the various factors that impact them.

Purpose of the Study

Based on the legislation and research, the purpose of the study is threefold: (1) to assess the current level and quality of students' participation in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings, (2) to investigate the extent to which teachers expect and enable special education students to participate in that process, and (3) to identify factors that may foster and/or suppress the participation of special education students in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings using multiple methodologies in an attempt to understand the perspectives of teachers in the field.

Operational Definitions

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

A written program developed and implemented in accordance with a detailed, legally mandated process, which must include a statement of a child's present levels of educational performance, of annual goals for the child (including short-term instructional objectives criteria, evaluation procedures and schedules for determining, at least annually, whether the stated instructional objectives are being achieved), of specific educational services to be provided to the child, and of the extent to which the child will be able to participate in regular educational programs. The IEP must specify projected dates for initiation of services and for the anticipated duration of such services, and, no later than when the student is age 14, it must include a statement of

the student's transition services needs that have been identified for the student's successful transition from school to adult life (Clark et al., 1994; Martin & Marshall, 1996).

Transition Planning

A coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities. Transition plan goals and services may include postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation, which planning is based on the individual student's needs, preferences and interests (Martin & Marshall, 1996; OSEP, 1997; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995).

Student Participation

Being included in formal and/or informal IEP/transition-related planning and annual IEP meetings for the purpose of giving input, having opportunities to speak for him/herself regarding interests, academics, and the educational program, including, but not limited to, the following: asking/answering questions, voicing personal/educational choices and preferences, and being part of the decision making process to establish the student's IEP/transition planning goals (Aune, 1991; Bos & Van Reusen, 1986; Ensminger, 1991; Lovitt et al., 1994; Martin & Marshall, 1996; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Legislative History of the IEP and Student Participation

A number of factors led up to and contributed to passage of the special education law. Its implementation was to have been guided by the congressional hearings and fact-findings, but it has been noted by many that the legalistic wording of the law and emphasis on due process procedures seemed to circumvent some of the original intent.

Underpinnings of the 1975 Law

The era of the 1970s was ripe for advancing the right-to-education concept for all children with disabilities. In the wake of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the women's movement in the 1970s, America was becoming sensitized to the complaints of dispossessed citizens unjustly denied fair and equal opportunities. In 1973, the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children reaffirmed the charge given it in 1971 by the U.S. Commissioner of Education that all children with disabilities have the right to a public education regardless of their deficit. Highly influential court proceedings also declared that "all children with handicaps have the same right to a public education as other children" (Goodman & Bond, 1993, p. 409).

One of the first landmark cases to set the stage for the 1975 law was the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971). The case was based on the constitutional right of every American child to equal protection under the law, and the court affirmed that this right related to educational opportunities. Educators' expert testimony established that individuals with mental retardation could profit from an education and contribute to society. A court-ordered survey of all eligible children with mental retardation in Pennsylvania indicated that 14,267 children had been denied access to public schools. The court rejected the argument that a lack of funds, personnel, and facilities were legitimate reasons for substandard education, and stipulated to a joint agreement in which the State agreed to provide the identified children with an education. The Pennsylvania case signaled the beginning of a succession of lawsuits in other states, and, in the case of Mills v. Board of Education, Washington D.C. (1972), the court ruled that all children with disabilities have a right to education.

The Law and Its Implementation

As noted in Chapter 1, passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] in 1990), at last guaranteed a free and appropriate public education to all children in the United States, regardless of their disability. The law was the culmination of many months of testimony and hearings. In the official finding of facts, Congress declared that:

1. the special educational needs of handicapped children are not being fully met; and

2. more than half of the handicapped children in the United States do not receive appropriate educational services and are thus denied full equality of opportunity. (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1979, p. 109)

In response to those limited opportunities, the law mandated that each child should receive an appropriate education based on their individual needs. These needs are to be addressed through the IEP, as was described in Chapter 1.

The IEP is most commonly identified as the cornerstone of the special education law (Lovitt et al., 1994; McLaughlin & Warren, 1995; Smith & Brownell, 1995; Tucker, Goldstein & Sorenson, 1993; Turnbull, Strickland & Brantley, 1982; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1979). Legalistically speaking, however,

> The IEP is not only a document--it is also the culmination of a prescribed process. It has thus substantially altered the means by which educators plan programming for disabled children. Educators must now work with parents, who are mandatory participants in this planning process and who are provided with procedural safeguards in the event that they disagree with the educators responsible for educating their children. (Tucker et al., 1:12)

Consequently, in order for a student's IEP to comply with the law, it must be developed and carried out in accordance with detailed, legally mandated procedures.

A legalistic model approach. There are many indications that compliance with the IEP's legal components has become the cornerstone of implementation in schools, rather than compliance with the legislative intent of providing students with input on an educational program designed to meet their unique and individual needs. Such a legalistic model relies more on due process and systematic review to ensure compliance than on outcomes. Smith and Brownell (1995) argue that IEPs are the primary audit track for noncompliance litigation and, therefore, the basic IEP characteristic is a legal

one, not one with an educational origin. As such, the result is a number of legal components that seem to have sidetracked the original legislative intent of providing a quality educational program for students with disabilities (Goodman & Bond, 1993; Smith & Brownell, 1995; Tucker et al., 1993).

Parental participation in developing the IEP. One of the legal components of the IEP is parent participation. This component was included in the law so that the IEP would serve at least three fundamental purposes:

1) they offer all those involved (child, parents, and professionals) the opportunity for input,
2) provide each child a program tailored to his or her individual needs in the least restrictive environment, and
3) enhance accountability through periodic evaluation reviews. (Goodman & Bond, 1993, p. 412)

From the beginning, the special education law protected parental rights to attend IEP meetings and actively participate as advocates for their minor children through detailed procedural safeguards (OSEP, 1997). Parents are to be afforded the opportunity to participate in the IEP conference and sent a notice to inform them of this opportunity; no mention was made of notifying students.

Student participation "whenever appropriate." When the law was enacted, the opportunity for children to have input was expressed in somewhat different terms. The only reference to student participation is that the child should be included at the conference "whenever appropriate" (Federal Register, 1977, p. 42490). Criteria for determining appropriateness were not addressed at that time, nor was an expected role for student participation defined.

However, Turnbull and Turnbull (1979), who were among the first special educators to publish an introduction to the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and its implementation requirements, included student participation in their description of the basic requirements for the IEP. They cited the Report of the House of Representatives [Report No. 94-332, Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, June 26, 1975, p. 13] as follows:

> (t)he movement toward the individualization of instruction, involving the participation of the child and the parent, as well as all relevant educational professionals, is a trend gaining ever wider support in educational, parental, and political groups throughout the nation. (p. 115)

Such a broad movement toward individualization of instruction by involving students in the IEP process seems never to have been fully realized. Instead, there has been a parent participation focus.

The Transition Services Initiative

As stated in Chapter 1, the transition services initiative began with the 1983 amendments of the special education law, which authorized--but did not mandate--the preparation of transition programs for students with disabilities. In 1990, IDEA was significantly expanded to not only mandate provision of transition services, but student participation in planning those services. The transition services must be indicated in the IEPs of all 16-year-old students. Students are also required to be invited to attend all meetings where their transition services will be considered.

IDEA defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to a wide

range of postschool activities. The statutory language went one step further, however, by also stating that "the coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests [IDEA, Section 602(a)(19)]," (Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995). A narrow interpretation of this language might lead to the conclusion that simply assessing student likes and dislikes in a given vocational area would suffice. Wehmeyer and Ward (1995), however, suggest that the intent of IDEA is best interpreted in line with other major policy initiatives affecting the transition of youth from school to adulthood, namely, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, PL 101-392, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), PL 101-336. A key element in both of these Acts is the mandate for active participation by consumers in the services they receive (p. 108).

Subsequently, the amendments to IDEA in 1997 clearly broadened the involvement of students in decision making (OSEP, 1997). Specifically, the 1997 amendments introduced the following new requirement with respect to students: beginning when the student is age 14, and every year thereafter, the IEP must include a statement of that student's transition service needs in relation to his or her courses of study. Transition needs shall also be based upon the individual student's preferences and interests. As stated in Chapter 1, according to OSEP training materials, the purpose of putting a statement of transition service needs into the IEP at age 14 was to focus attention on how the child's educational program can be planned to help the child make a successful transition to his or her goals for life after secondary school. The

provision was designed to augment, and not replace, the 1990 provision that, beginning no later than age 16, students with disabilities are to begin receiving transition services. However, those services are now to be based on the students' needs, which have been identified in their IEPs since age 14 (OSEP, 1997).

Limited Student Participation

Although, in theory, the law opened the door for students' involvement in their educational planning and decision making, their participation in the IEP process has been limited (Bos & Van Reusen, 1986; Salend, 1983). For example, when Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull and Curry (1980) observed 14 IEP meetings in three different North Carolina school districts, they found the resource teacher to be the most dominant speaker. The conversation was mostly a review of an already developed IEP, which was directed toward parents. Student involvement was for the most part either nonexistent or passive.

Karge, Patton, and de la Garza (1992) found that, even though students were asked to prioritize their own transition planning needs, special educators disregarded the student input about what they felt was most important. The professionals surveyed rated transportation as the lowest transition priority need for students with mild disabilities, while the students placed it as the most needed area of instruction. Conversely, educators rated career planning and vocational preparation as most important, disregarding students' choice of transportation, which students knew would be an essential need for their postschool independence, mobility, and freedom of movement.

Ensminger (1991) found similar practices in his study of five metropolitan Atlanta school systems. He observed and talked with students in eleven schools in. Among other findings, he concluded that: (a) students do not have much say in what or how they are taught, (b) they are much more perceptive about their needs than educators give them credit for, and (c) students have much to offer in planning an effective learning program for themselves.

As noted earlier, Turnbull and Turnbull (1979) justified student participation in the IEP based on legislative intent and a trend they felt was gaining wide support in educational, parental, and political groups throughout the nation toward involving the participation of the child and the parent, as well as educational professionals, for developing individualization of instruction. Such a broad movement toward individualization of instruction by involving students in the IEP process seems never to have been fully realized.

In 1981, policy interpretation guidelines were published in the Federal Register, which provided information on the criteria to be used for determining the appropriateness of student participation in the IEP meeting (Bos & Van Reusen, 1986; Turnbull, et al., 1982):

> Generally, a handicapped child should attend the IEP meeting whenever the parent decides that it is appropriate for the child to do so. Whenever possible, the agency and parents should discuss the appropriateness of the child's participation before a decision is made in order to help the parents determine whether or not the child's attendance will be (1) helpful in developing the IEP and/or (2) directly beneficial to the child. The agency must inform the parents before each IEP meeting--as part of the "notice of meeting" required under Sec. 300.345 (b)--that they may invite their child to participate. Note: The parents and agency should encourage older handicapped children (particularly those at

> the secondary level) to participate in their IEP meetings (Federal Register, 1981, p. 5467).

Thus, the regulation guidelines--which do not have the force of law--stated that the criterion for determining student participation--after discussing it with school personnel--was to be the decision of the parent. Although the student's role is implied by stating that consideration should be given as to whether the student will be "helpful in developing the IEP," and a "helpful" role does suggest that students could offer input in an active rather than passive capacity, it was not widely recognized as a legal component (Turnbull, et al., 1982, p. 216).

Reasons for Limited Student Participation

Multiple reasons for limited student participation are suggested in the literature. These reasons fall into four general categories, which will be discussed in turn: perceptions of student capabilities, teachers' attitudes and knowledge, systemic factors, and parental awareness.

Perceptions of students' capabilities. Rather than being seen as active participants, studies indicate that students with disabilities are routinely thought to be unable to contribute to the IEP process, and have become viewed as passive recipients of special services (Bos & Van Reusen, 1986; deNomme, 1995; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Ensminger, 1991). In the classroom setting, Houghton, Bronicki, and Guess (1987) studied the opportunities of students with severe disabilities to express preferences and make choices as they observed classroom staff ($n = 45$) responding to 37 students with severe disabilities. Houghton et al. found that, regardless of the

setting or age level, staff responded at very low rates to student-initiated expressions of choice or preference. Similarly, the few studies that have explored the limited opportunities of students to participate in the IEP process have found that one factor seems to be given repeatedly by educators as a reason to exclude students from IEP meetings: the presence of a severe disabling condition (Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983; Phillips,1990; Salend, 1983; Wehmeyer, 1992).

However, exclusion from educational planning and expressions of choice or preference have also been found to be the experience of students with mild disabilities. Neither do students with mild disabilities appear to have been viewed as able to participate, and thereby gained access to the educational process (Aune, 1991; Bos & Van Reusen, 1986; Ensminger, 1991; Lovitt, et al., 1994; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995). Because it appears that special education students, regardless of their disability, are viewed as the recipients of special services, Peters (1990) concluded that, as a result, they are "often not perceived by administrators, teachers, or parents to be an integral part of the IEP team, with the right . . . to assist in the development and implementation of their own special education program" (p. 32).

In their analysis of student interviews conducted at two high schools in the Seattle area, Lovitt, et al. found that students were unfamiliar with the IEP process and had contributed little to it. Of note is the fact that all of the students studied had mild disabilities; they were able to converse and, in fact, shared definite opinions on most other topics. Nine of the 15 students at one school knew that their parents attended a meeting of some sort and signed a paper. Four students were unsure of what an IEP

was. Seven of the 14 students at the other school said that they had attended at least one IEP meeting since starting special education. When asked to describe those experiences, most of the students said they just sat there and did not understand what was going on.

Teachers' attitudes and knowledge. Teachers' attitudes and knowledge base have an impact on special education students' participation in decision making. Lipsky and Gartner (1987) suggest that the explanation for this failure to create opportunities for choice making and developing independence in the special education system is not because of children's disability level, but is an outcome of professional attitudes and resultant practices. Lipsky and Gartner believe "such deficiencies in special education practice are a function of at least two sets of factors: (a) those concerning schools and pedagogy and (b) those concerning attitudes toward persons with disabilities" (p. 69).

As to the second factor, Antonak and Livneh (1988), noted scholars in the study and measurement of attitudes toward people with disabilities, conceptualize three distinct, yet interacting, social circles--or levels--of attitudes: (1) the innermost circle includes attitudes exhibited by relatives, friends, and peers of the person with a disability, (2) the next circle encompasses their relationships with professionals, such as teachers, and (3) the third attitudinal circle, that of society at large, is where barriers to the fulfillment of roles and attainment of life goals originate. As the providers of information, services, and students' exposure to life's possibilities, educators' attitudes have an enormous impact on students' psychosocial development, while also

influencing the attitudes of the first social circle--namely, family and peers--as well as the attitudes exhibited within the third circle, society at large.

In relation to participation in decisions about their educational program, teacher attitudes appear to be influential. In fact, Salend (1983) reported he found that many professionals held the belief that participation in the IEP process is not feasible because "the student 'can't do it' and 'doesn't know how to do it'" (p. 65). However, Salend also felt practitioners did not know how to include students in the IEP process because a systematic model for enabling students to participate had not been developed.

Parents' awareness. Lack of awareness of the possibility of including their children in the IEP/transition planning process and the resultant benefits from that has been thought to be another reason behind limited student participation. Gillespie (1981) elicited ideas from those who are most affected by the IEP: 47 special education students (12 years of age and older) and their parents. They were asked to cite considerations in deciding when to include a student. Respondents were classified by their schools as learning disabled, educable mentally handicapped, seriously emotionally handicapped, or physically handicapped [sic]. Ninety percent of the parents said that they were unaware of the possibility of involving students in IEP meetings. When Gillespie asked the participants about their attitudes toward student participation, over 90% of the parents and 75% of the students expressed positive feelings. Years later, deNomme (1995) found the same thing: parents unaware of the fact that IDEA encourages the student to be an active participant in the transition decision-making process and IEP development.

Parents also appear not to perceive the long-term benefits of supporting active student participation. As a result of evaluating 26 U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) research and model demonstration projects in the areas of choice and self-determination during fiscal years 1990-1993, Ward (1996) came to an interesting conclusion. The project evaluations indicated students with disabilities may especially need to develop skills for self-determination because many parents had difficulty perceiving their children as becoming empowered and self-determined adults.

Systemic factors. The purpose of education for all students, with and without disabilities, is preparation for adulthood. Unfortunately, some believe there are aspects of the special education process that serve as barriers to this outcome (Ianacone & Stodden, 1987; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987). The need to structure the special education classroom to meet educational, behavioral and administrative requirements may result in an environment that promotes dependence and limits student participation and choice making opportunities (Wehmeyer, 1992; Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1996). Restricted access to opportunities to express preferences and learn from mistakes substantially reduces the ability of adolescents with disabilities to learn the skills needed to access, use, and benefit from adult independent living, as well as develop the aptitude to approach interpersonal and vocational opportunities upon leaving school (Powers, et al., 1996). This overall limiting of choice making may underlie the limited participation of students in their IEP development.

Systemic factors may also influence student participation in transition planning. In a report on perceptions of the efficacy of current transition planning practices in Connecticut, Walker and Shaw (1996) indicated that a discrepancy exists between current levels of transition planning and what are considered desirable best practices. The responses of the special educators in the study indicated that transition planning does not necessarily take into consideration the interests, wants, and needs of the students, but rather what parents and the educational system think is important.

In a recent policy study by Hasazi, Purney, and Destefano (1999), which investigated implementation of the transition mandates of IDEA, systemic concerns pertinent to student participation were identified in nine secondary school sites across the United States. Among the concerns identified was the need to structure meetings in a more student-centered, family-friendly format. In addition, concerns were noted about ways to incorporate student participation earlier than IDEA mandates so that students at the elementary and middle school levels have increased involvement in the IEP planning process.

Outcomes of Limited Student Participation

The barriers to student participation and the limited nature of special education student participation found in the literature is a cause for concern. Multiple long-term negative outcomes have been identified. These include learned helplessness, and constricted postschool outcomes.

Learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is reinforced by environmental factors which encourage passivity by 1) providing little opportunity for an individual to

actively generate successful responses, 2) not giving children opportunities to develop decision-making skills, and 3) communicating expectations of noninvolvement or failure (Ayres, Cooley & Dunn, 1990; Houghton, et al., 1987; Hoy, 1986; Peterson, Maier & Seligman, 1993). Sands and Doll (1996) suggest that, by excluding students from participation in IEP meetings and transition planning, many students come to believe that they are helpless. Sands and Doll observed that students come to believe that the conditions controlling their lives are managed by adults, and that they cannot direct or affect their own success in academic or daily tasks.

Constricted postschool outcomes. Limited participation in decision making and choice making also appears to be related to problems adjusting to adult roles (Phillips, 1990; Ward, 1996; White, 1992). For example, one study of the transition of 84 students with significant disabilities from school to adult life found that students not involved in transition planning were more likely to work in a segregated setting after graduating from school, and less likely to have had self-advocacy skills listed as a goal on their IEPs (Getzel & de Fur, 1997). A disturbing finding of this study mentioned by the authors was the large number of students they found who had never participated in the IEP/transition planning process.

Results from Aune's (1991) 5-year federally funded project for 55 students transitioning to postsecondary education also suggested that successful transition to adult roles was related to involvement in decision making. Aune also recommended beginning transition planning before the ninth grade.

Alternatives to Limited Student Participation

As has been described, there are both multiple benefits from participation in decision making and the IEP/transition planning process, and negative outcomes as a result of such participation not occurring. These benefits have led individuals with disabilities, researchers, and practitioners alike to identify and promote the following alternatives to limited student participation from data that support changes and program improvements.

The self-determination movement. Self-determination and self-advocacy had their origins in the grass-roots independent living movement of the 1970s, which grew out of students' struggles for off-campus wheelchair accessible housing in Berkeley, California. In the 1990s, self-determination became a popular concept in the field of special education and transition planning. In discussing the transition services requirements of IDEA, Halloran (1993) identified self-determination as the "ultimate goal of education" (p. 214). For educational purposes, Sands and Doll (1996) conceptualized self-determination as an adult outcome of childhood experiences that enhance an individual's independence and self-direction. Their premise is that effective schooling should provide all students with the attitudes and competencies associated with achieving adulthood and being entitled, as an adult, to make informed choices for themselves. Involving students in their transition planning meetings is one way to facilitate such informed choice making and self-determination in adulthood.

Ward (1996) firmly believes that training focused on self-determination skills should begin with very young children long before those students prepare to leave

school to assume their adult responsibilities of work, independent living, and community participation. This belief was based on his review of the 26 OSERS demonstration projects discussed earlier. Other studies have indicated that, by waiting until the teen years to foster self-determination in transition planning, it will be a difficult--if not impossible--task to undo years of learned helplessness, dependence and passivity (Aune, 1991, Brolin, 1995; Sands & Doll, 1996; Wehmeyer, 1994; Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995).

Wehmeyer and Lawrence (1995) described a self-determination model program to reverse the negative outcomes of limited participation. They evaluated a year-long field-test of the student-directed transition planning program, "Whose Future is it Anyway." The program was designed specifically to enable 53 learners with cognitive disabilities, primarily mental retardation and learning disabilities, to assume a more meaningful role in their transition planning process. The mean age of participants was 16.91 years (SD = 1.60). The program consisted of 36 sessions introducing students to the concept of transition and transition planning by empowering students to self-direct school instruction related to (a) self- and disability-awareness, (b) making decisions about transition-related outcomes, (c) identifying and securing community support resources, (d) writing/evaluating transition goals and objectives, (e) communicating effectively, and (f) developing skills to become an effective team member, leader or self-advocate. The materials made every effort to enable students to be in control while at the same time receiving the support they needed to succeed.

It was not the degree to which students could independently accomplish the activities, but the degree to which students had--or believed they had--control over the process that enabled successful student-directed learning. The data showed that, on average, the students--and particularly the young women in the study--had come to believe they did not have control over their lives, especially in educational settings.

When taken as a whole, the field-test results strongly support the positive influence of actively involving students in their transition planning process. Wehmeyer and Lawrence (1995) concluded, however, that it may be unreasonable to expect any single-year intervention to overcome years of negative perceptions and beliefs these students exhibited, which had been reinforced by, among other things, a lack of previous decision-making opportunities in the IEP process.

Learned hopefulness. Zimmerman (1990) analyzed participation and empowerment after reviewing the learned helplessness literature. He tested two competing structural models in an effort to develop a theory of learned hopefulness with a sample consisting of 388 undergraduate students and 205 community residents. He found that empowering experiences--ones that provide opportunities to learn skills and develop a sense of control--help limit the harmful effects of passivity and learned helplessness. According to Zimmerman's findings, providing students with opportunities to learn skills and develop a sense of control would enable students with disabilities to approach transition problems with hopefulness.

Choice making programs. Recent attention has been focused on choice making and decision making due in part to 26 research and model demonstration projects in the

areas of choice and self-determination, which--as mentioned earlier--were sponsored by OSERS during fiscal years 1990-1993. Those projects focused on self-determination as a process whereby students become actively involved in setting goals and making choices, which brought increased awareness of the importance of this topic to youth with disabilities. The process was facilitated in many of the projects through activities such as self-evaluation; goal setting; and, formally, IEP planning and implementation. Data from the OSERS projects indicated that positive outcomes definitely increased when students learned to make choices, to be assertive, and to self-advocate.

Research in the 1980s indicated that, regardless of the severity level of students' disabilities, opportunities to make choices have positive effects. Early on, Realon, et al. (1990) evaluated the effects of selecting leisure items on profoundly multiply handicapped [sic] individuals. Based on their rates of responding, the results showed that when individuals were able to make choices, their rates of interacting with leisure materials increased. The results were discussed in terms of future programming needs in special education and research with this population, which the researchers posited might best be accomplished by involving clients in their educational program decision making process.

Student Participation Cautions

According to Fleming and Fleming (1987), there are some potential risks and harm from involving students in decision-making. They cautioned that, when weighing the potential risks versus the benefits of children's involvement in decision-making, the specific type of decision to be made (e.g., possibly denying themselves needed

psychoeducational interventions) as well as the competencies of each child, must be considered. Stating that, though most research suggests student participation in routine educational planning should be encouraged, Fleming and Fleming emphasize that if children become displeased with their involvement, they should also be allowed to withdraw whenever they wish to do so. Wehmeyer (1992) also points out that allowing choice and self-determination should not be equated with the removal of all constraints or structure. It seems obvious that, although self-determination may manifest itself in choices that are in conflict with what educators perceive as optimal, student choice making cannot be extended to situations where personal preferences would take priority over, for example, the potential for life-threatening outcomes.

When writing about the legal ramifications of involving minors in special education decision making, Fleming and Fleming (1987) confirm there is no longer any doubt that the courts believe children possess fundamental rights and enjoy constitutional interests shared by adults, and that only allowing children to participate in IEPs at the discretion of their parents and the school system denies them meaningful involvement and the opportunity to express their special concerns. Noting the availability of model programs for involving children in decision making, and the recent research indicating that children have the competencies needed for effective participation, Fleming and Fleming articulated--as did Lipsky and Gartner (1987)--the concept that increasing student involvement would represent a step toward acknowledging that children with disabilities are persons with their own interests and rights.

Conclusions

According to congressional records and many scholars, passage of the law guaranteeing a free, appropriate public education to all children with disabilities in 1975 had as its intent individualization of instruction by involving children in the IEP process, which--by all accounts--seems never to have been fully realized. Research has in fact indicated that students participate very little, and, even though amendments to IDEA have mandated some student input for transition planning, the literature overwhelmingly suggests student participation in transition planning is not happening on a widespread basis as of yet. Many reasons have been suggested as contributing to this limited participation, including the following:

a) limited teacher knowledge of student participation possibilities;
b) teacher and parent perceptions that students have limited capabilities;
c) limited parent awareness that, by law, students are entitled to participate and can benefit from their participation;
d) systemic factors such as classroom organization and structure that lead to limited decision making and choice making opportunities;
e) legal formalities and meeting structures, and, perhaps, the focus of IDEA on transition input only for students at age 14.

We also know there are negative outcomes of limited participation, and that alternative models to increase student participation have been developed by educators and successfully tested. The potential for furthering students' growth, maturity, and the exercise of self-determination over their own lives with these models is tremendous.

According to Turnbull, et al. (1982) active student participation is based on several assumptions: (a) students are often capable of identifying their own educational needs; (b) the appropriateness of the student's IEP will be enhanced by student

participation in decision making; and (c) student involvement will contribute to increased accountability on the part of educators. Turnbull, et al. noted that their assumptions were not based on empirical evidence, and that practically no literature was available on training students for IEP involvement at that time. However, they suggested that such training should be provided for the full intent of the law to actually be realized. Like others to follow, Turnbull, et al. declared that providing an opportunity for students to participate is different than providing the tools they need to be effective participants.

The complex nature of these findings and assumptions about student participation require further investigation. Research needs to examine whether limited student participation occurs even with recent legal mandates requiring more active student participation. If limited student participation still exists, research that directly examines the contributing factors is also needed.

This study was therefore designed to assess the current level and quality of student participation in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings, and to carefully analyze the contributing factors. If significant levels of either limited participation or facilitated participation are found, only by directly assessing these contributing factors can suggestions be made on what changes--if any--should occur. To be useful to the field, these suggestions must be based on timely empirical data and the reflections of key stakeholders in the IEP process. The proposed study will focus on teachers and their views of what influences their practices.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The goals of this study were threefold: (1) to investigate the extent to which the teachers who volunteered to be participants in the study expect and enable their special education students to participate in the IEP/transition planning and annual meeting process, (2) to assess the level and quality of participation of their students in that process, and (3) to identify factors that may foster and/or suppress the participation of special education students in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings.

The research design was descriptive. The study gathered quantitative data from a self-report survey instrument titled "IEP Questionnaire" (see Appendix A) along with qualitative data from audio-taped, semi-structured follow-up interviews using a Telephone Interview Protocol (see Appendix B).

Data Collection

The sample was one of convenience and purpose. Approval was given by the instructors of graduate-level special education courses on the CSULB campus for a research assistant to come into their class to recruit volunteers to participate in the thesis research survey. Students were asked to volunteer in all required Educational

Psychology (EdP) courses being taught by the special education program faculty in the Spring 2000 semester:

> EdP 405, Positive Strategies for Classroom Management; EdP 480, Foundations of Inclusive Education in a Diverse Society; Philosophical and Historical Perspectives and Legal Mandates; EdP 535, Collaborative Partnerships and Effective Communication in School Settings; EdP 564, Assessment and Evaluation of Students with Disabilities; EdP 569, Effective Instructional Strategies for Learners with Disabilities; EdP 695, Seminar in Special Education.

Potential participants were told about the study during class at a time which had been pre-specified by the instructor. The purpose of the survey was explained, and Research Consent Forms (see Appendix C) were distributed for completion to those in the class who were eligible under the research protocol and volunteered to complete the survey ($n = 32$). Because the researcher is a wheelchair user, the in-class procedures were administered by a nondisabled research assistant in order to avoid possible experimenter effect. After the Research Consent Forms were completed, participants individually gave their form to the research assistant, who put the signed form in a 10x14 envelope and then gave the questionnaire to the individual. Upon completion, questionnaires were deposited by participants into a sealed box to guarantee anonymity, and they were then given a $5 university bookstore gift certificate.

On the Research Consent Form, participants also were asked to volunteer for a follow-up telephone interview with the researcher, in which participants' identity would be kept confidential and from which their name would not be revealed when the study results were analyzed and reported. The form stated that telephone interviews would

be audio-taped, that the tapes would be transcribed by a typist not connected with CSULB, and that participants had the right to request to review/edit the tape at the time of the interview.

Instrumentation

To measure the extent to which participants' special education students participate in the Individualized Education Program (IEP), transition planning and annual meeting process, and to assess the level and quality of that participation, the "IEP Questionnaire" included 22 questions about teachers' practices using a 5-point Likert scale of Always (5), Often (4), Sometimes (3), Rarely (2), and Never (1) for responses. Participants were also asked to rate the process used at their school for planning, developing and writing IEPs and Transition Plans using a scale of (4) Excellent, (3) Good, (2) Fair or (1) Poor. Further explanations/comments were requested, to enhance the quality of the results.

To identify factors that may foster and/or suppress the participation of special education students in the IEP/transition planning and annual meeting process, 11 statements were designed for use with a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4), Somewhat Agree (3), to Somewhat Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). All questions and statements were based on the presumed intent of IDEA and its current transition mandates, as well as on empirical data, findings and recommendations taken from the researcher's review of the literature.

To establish internal consistency, the researcher-designed survey instrument was critiqued by CSULB faculty for content-related evidence of clarity, relevance, level

of agreement and correlation of opinion items measuring the same practice. A pilot test of the instrument was administered after the protocol was approved by the university's Internal Review Board, and the instrument was administered in April and May, 2000.

Triangulation of the data was accomplished with the follow-up telephone interviews in the study's second stage. Questions were based on the statistical tabulation of the high/low modal scores as well as analysis of the quantitative self-report survey data. The interview protocol was drafted to enhance understanding of the survey responses, with emphasis on low modal and mean responses. Both the interview protocol and oral consent text were submitted to CSULB's Internal Review Board for approval. Participants were then contacted to be interviewed by the researcher, who, prior to studying educational research techniques in graduate school, had eight years of interviewing experience as a syndicated newspaper columnist. The interviews were audio-taped. Participants had the option of reviewing and editing the transcription before it was added to the study; which no one chose to do. Interview lengths ranged from 25 to 35 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of the self-report survey responses focused on measures of central tendency, standard deviation, and crosstabulations for response distribution percentages. The 1999 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 10.0 was used.

Qualitative data analysis of the transcripts from the semi-structured telephone interviews included content review and theme analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). The

researcher, a special education teacher and a Professor in Special Education then independently reviewed the data set and identified trends, patterns, or relationships among themes to further synthesize understandings. A consensus model was used in identification of the final interview categories.

Participants

The survey sample consisted of individuals who were current graduate-level students in the special education program in the College of Education at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). Participants also were required to be employed as teachers or paraeducators who were working with special education pupils age 14 or older. Age 14 was chosen because that is when pupils in special education are in fact mandated by the special education law to participate in the transition planning component of the IEP.

Of the total number of CSULB graduate students in attendance on the days of the survey's administration, and who also were eligible to participate ($N = 37$), 86% volunteered to do so ($n = 32$). Twenty-two of the 32 were in the middle of completing the requirements for a basic special education credential; 10 were completing advanced level training. Seventeen (53%) of the 32 participants agreed to a follow-up telephone interview, providing their telephone number on the Research Consent Form and a preferred time to be contacted by the researcher during the first two weeks of June. Eleven interviews (64%) were completed. Incorrect telephone numbers and scheduling difficulties interfered with completion of the six remaining interviews.

Survey Demographic Characteristics

Of the 32 individuals who completed the IEP Questionnaire, 19% (n = 6) were male and 81% (n = 26) were female. Age category ranges were from 20-25 years (n = 5), 26-30 years (n = 9), 31-40 years (n = 8), 41-50 years (n = 6), to 50+ years old (n = 4); (M = 39). A majority of the participants (71.9%), (n = 23) had been working with special education students for 1-5 years, four had been in special education 6-10 years, two for 11-15 years, one for 16-20 years and two had been in the field for 20+ years. One participant had been a general education teacher for 1-5 years, and reported currently having five students with learning disabilities in class (see Table 1).

Fifteen of the participants worked at the middle school level (grades 6-8) or the junior high level (grades 7-8), and 17 were working at the high school level (grades 9-12 or 10-12). Ninety-three per cent (n = 30) of the individuals were teachers, one was a paraeducator and one an administrator in a private school. Job titles included Resource Specialist (n = 11) and Special Day Class Teacher (n = 18). The type of school districts people worked in were urban (n = 16) and suburban (n = 13). Two reported working in an institutional setting and one person did not report on the type of school district (see Table 2).

Ages of students with whom participants worked ranged from 14 to 21 years (M = 15.45). Grade levels of the students ranged from grade 6 to grade 12+ (M = 9.23), and the number of students in participants' classes or caseloads ranged from 5 to 54 (M = 20.59). The largest groups of pupils being served were identified as those with Specific Learning Disabilities, followed by Emotionally Disturbed and

Speech and Language Impaired. A complete listing of the disability classifications of all students served in participants' classes or caseloads was also prepared (see Table 3).

TABLE 1. Survey Participants' Age, Gender and Years in Special Education

Age	Years Working in Special Education	n Male	n Female	P Age
20-25	1-5 (General Ed. Teacher)		1	
20-25	1-5	1	3	15.6
26-30	1-5	1	7	
	11-15		1	28.1
31-40	1-5	2	3	
	6-10	1	2	25.0
41-50	1-5		3	
	6-10		1	
41-50	11-15		1	
	20+		1	18.8
50+	1-5	1	1	
	16-20		1	
	20+		1	12.5
	Totals:	n = 6	n = 26	100.0

TABLE 2. Survey Participants' Current Education Level, Educational Objectives, Job Titles and School Levels Taught

Highest Degree Held:	Percentage
Bachelor's	81.3
Bachelor's + Certificate	12.5
Master's	6.3
CSULB Educational Objective:	
Master's Degree	31.3
Certificate	46.9
Both	21.9
Current Job Title:	
Special Day Class Teacher	53.1
Resource Specialist	36.5
Other*	9.4
School Level Taught	
Middle/Jr. High School	46.9
High School	53.1

*(1) Administrator in NPS, (1) Paraeducator, (1) General Education Teacher.

TABLE 3. Disability Classifications of Pupils Taught by Survey Participants

Frequency Count	Percent	Classification
24	19.2	Specific Learning Disability
14	11.2	Emotionally Disturbed
13	10.4	Speech & Language Impaired
12	9.6	Autistic
11	8.8	Mental Retardation
10	8.0	Multiply Handicapped
7	5.6	Hard-of-Hearing
7	5.6	Orthopedically Impaired
7	5.6	Other Health Impaired
5	4.0	Traumatic Brain Injury
6	4.8	Visually Impaired
4	3.2	Deaf
3	2.4	Deaf-Blind

Note. Two participants did not designate the classification(s) of their pupils.

Interview Demographic Characteristics

Of the 11 individuals who were interviewed, 19% (n = 2) were male and 81% (n = 9) were female. Age ranges were from 27-55 years (M = 40.8). Forty-five percent of the participants (n = 5) had been working with special education students for 2 years, one had been in special education for 5 years, two for 4 years, one for 3 years, one for 1 year, and another had been in the field for 20 years (M = 4.27).

Five of the participants worked at the middle school level (grades 6-8) or the junior high level (grades 7-8), and six were working at the high school level (grades 9-12 or 10-12). All of the individuals were teachers; job titles included Resource Specialist (n = 7) and Special Day Class Teacher (n = 4) (see Table 4). The interview participants' demographics were representative of the study population as a whole in the areas of age, gender, years of experience and grade level taught. However, the interview sample included a larger proportion of resource specialists (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. Interview and Survey Participant Comparisons

	Percentage	
	Survey Sample	Interview Sample
Gender		
Male	.19	.19
Female	.81	.81
Current Job Titles:		
Resource Specialist	36.5	63.6
Special Day Class Teacher	53.1	36.4
Other	9.4	
Grade Levels Taught		
Middle School	46.9	45.5
High School	53.1	54.5

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Self-Report Survey Responses

The survey asked participants about their practices, experiences, opinions and beliefs related to student participation in the IEP/transition planning and annual meeting process. Using a Likert scale of Always (5), Often (4), Sometimes (3), Rarely (2), and Never (1), the first three sections of the questionnaire addressed teachers' practices in the areas of: a) the IEP, b) its transition planning component, and c) annual IEP meetings. In the next section of the questionnaire, they were asked to rate the process used at their school for planning, developing and writing IEPs as well as for transition plans on a scale of Excellent (4), Good (3), Fair (2), or Poor (1). In the last section, participants were asked about their level of agreement or disagreement regarding factors that the literature indicated can have an impact on student participation. These statements used a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4), Somewhat Agree (3), to Somewhat Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1).

The first step in data analysis was to examine measures of central tendency and distribution of responses. Means, standard deviations, and modal scores were tabulated and analyzed. Next, data obtained from crosstabulations of questions in each section provided the percentages used to examine the distribution of responses. To examine

patterns of relationships, crosstabulations were also prepared for responses by participants age, gender, the number of years working in education, and the grade level at which they worked; no relationships were found.

Section 1: When Preparing a Student's IEP

On average, participants reported talking sometimes-to-often with their students about the purposes of the IEP before writing it (M = 3.83, SD = 1.18, mode = 5). Responses were slightly lower when asked if they talk about the students' strengths before writing an IEP (M = 3.54, SD = 1.02, mode = 3). Also, participants said they sometimes-to-often write the IEP before annual meetings (M = 3.61, SD = 1.22, mode = 4). In general, participants responded that their students sometimes-to-often know whether they achieved last year's IEP goals (M = 3.50, SD = 1.27, mode = 4).

When participants were asked if they and other IEP team members have planning sessions before annual meetings, the responses on average fell between rarely-to-sometimes (M = 2.71, SD = 1.31, mode = 2). Responses were also between rarely-to-sometimes for providing students input on their IEP goals at IEP team planning sessions (M = 3.03, SD = 1.16, mode = 2). Also, participants reported that their students, on average, only sometimes have opportunities to make choices in establishing IEP goals (M = 3.22, SD = 1.11, mode = 3). The proportional distribution of responses to the IEP-related questions were also prepared (see Table 5).

Section 2: When Developing a Student's Transition Plan

On average, participants reported they often talk with students about the purpose of the transition plan before developing it (M = 4.06, SD = 1.03, mode = 4).

And, before developing a transition plan; they responded that they often-to-always talk with each student about his or her interests (M = 4.38, SD = .98, mode = 5). The general response for students having input on their transition goals at planning sessions was sometimes-to-often (M = 3.64, SD = 1.22, mode = 5). Student opportunities to make decisions in establishing transition plan goals were slightly greater (M = 3.96, SD = 1.13, mode = 5). On average, participants and other staff members and/or service providers only sometimes have transition planning sessions before annual meetings (M = 3.03, SD = 1.16, mode = 3). And, on average, participants responded they sometimes-to-often write the transition plan before the annual meeting (M = 3.25, SD = 1.26, mode = 4). The proportional distribution of responses to the transition-related questions were also prepared (see Table 6).

Section 3: Students at Annual IEP Meetings

Participants responded that students often-to-always attend their annual IEP meetings (M = 4.31, SD = 1.05, mode = 5), but that students rarely-to-never lead part or all of that meeting (M = 2.09, SD = .97, mode = 1). Participants also responded that generally their students only sometimes ask questions at annual IEP meetings (M = 3.03, SD = 1.12, mode = 3).

When participants were asked if students discuss or indicate how their IEP goals relate to their own strengths at the annual meeting, the average response was sometimes-to-rarely (M = 2.62, SD = 1.15, mode = 3). Participants also said students only sometimes-to-rarely report on their progress toward achieving IEP goals at the annual meeting (M = 2.59, SD = 1.01, mode = 3). But participants responded that, on

average, their students sometimes-to-often are asked questions about their IEP at annual meetings (M = 3.34, SD = 1.23, mode = 3).

Regarding students discussing transition or indicating how their transition goals relate to their own interests at annual meetings, participants responded that this occurs on average only sometimes-to-rarely (M = 2.80, SD = 1.16, mode = 3). Additionally, participants said students only report sometimes-to-rarely on their progress toward achieving transition goals (M = 2.63, SD = 1.09, mode = 3). However, on average, participants responded that students are sometimes-to-often asked questions about their transition plan at the meetings (M = 3.59, SD = 1.16, mode = 4). The proportional distribution of responses to the annual meeting questions were also prepared (see Table 7).

Section 4: Rating Their School's IEP and Transition Process

Participants were then asked to rate the process used at their school for planning, developing and writing IEPs. On average, responses fell in the fair-to-good range (M = 2.68, SD = .82, mode = 3). Two teachers said their school's IEP process was poor, 11 rated theirs fair, 14 said the process was good, and 5 said it was excellent. Using the same rating scale, participants said the process practiced at their school for planning, developing and writing transition plans was also, on average, fair-to-good (M = 2.53, SD = .71, mode = 3). Two teachers said the transition process was poor, 13 rated their process as only fair, 15 said it was good, and 2 said excellent. The proportional distribution of responses to rating the process used at participants' schools for developing and writing IEPs and transition plans was also done (see Table 8).

Additional explanations and comments were written by many participants in response to those two questions, and responses were also made to a final open-ended question asking for other opinions or beliefs that participants might have about student participation (see Appendix D). In general, the majority of those comments indicated that the process and student participation could be improved. The following quotes are examples of this:

"I think sometimes new teachers do not have enough training."

"There is no formal process. Special Ed at my school just does what they need to do. Administrators attend, but [are] not really a participant."

"I would have liked to have seen more student participation as well as other direct staff involvement."

TABLE 5. Proportional Distribution of Responses to IEP-related Questions 1-6, 22

Question	Percentage				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Talk with Student about IEP Purposes	38.7	25.8	19.4	12.9	3.2
Talk with Student about Student Strengths	22.6	22.6	45.2	6.5	3.2
Student has Input on IEP Goals	13.3	23.3	26.7	30.0	6.7
Student Has Choices on IEP Goals	16.1	22.6	32.3	25.8	3.2
Have IEP Planning Sessions	16.7	6.7	23.3	36.7	16.7
Write IEP Before Annual Meeting	25.8	35.5	22.6	6.5	9.7
Do Students Know if Achieved Last Year's IEP Goals	25.0	31.3	21.9	12.5	9.4

Note: The paraeducator left questions 1-6 and 22 blank.

TABLE 6. Proportional Distribution of Responses to Transition-related Questions 7-12

Question	Percentage				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Talk with student about Transition Purposes	38.7	41.9	9.7	6.5	3.2
Talk about Student Transition Interests	61.3	25.8	6.5	3.2	3.2
Student has Input on Transition Goals	32.3	22.6	29.0	9.7	6.5
Student Makes Decisions on Transition Goals	38.7	35.5	16.1	3.2	6.5
Have Transition Planning Sessions	16.1	9.7	45.2	19.4	9.7
Write Transition Plan Before Annual Meeting	16.1	32.3	25.8	12.9	12.9

Note: The paraeducator left questions 7-12 blank.

TABLE 7. Proportional Distribution of Responses to Annual Meeting Questions 13-21

Question	Percentage				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do students Attend Annual IEP Meeting	64.5	12.9	16.1	3.2	3.2
Do students Lead Annual IEP Meeting	0.0	6.5	32.3	25.8	35.5
Do Students Ask Questions at Meeting	9.4	21.9	37.5	21.9	9.4
Do students Discuss Strengths and IEP Goals	6.3	12.5	40.6	18.8	21.9
Do students Report on IEP Progress	3.1	12.5	40.6	28.1	15.6
Are Students Asked IEP Questions	21.9	21.9	34.4	12.5	9.4
Do students Discuss Interests and Transition Goals	6.5	12.9	41.9	22.6	16.1
Do students Report on Transition Progress	6.5	12.9	41.9	22.6	16.1
Are Students Asked Transition Questions	25.0	31.3	28.1	9.4	6.3

TABLE 8. Proportional Distribution of Responses to Questions 23 and 24

Question	Percentage			
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Rate the process used at your school for developing and writing IEPs	15.6	43.8	34.4	6.3
Rate the process used at your school for developing & writing transition plans	6.3	46.9	40.6	6.3

Section 5: Levels of Agreement with Participation Factors

In the last section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with 11 factors noted in the literature as circumstances that can foster and/or suppress the participation of special education students in the IEP/transition planning and annual meeting process. The means, standard deviations, and modal scores were tabulated from participant answers on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4), Somewhat Agree (3), to Somewhat Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). The proportional distribution for levels of agreement and disagreement were also prepared (see Table 9).

Participants generally strongly agreed that their students are expected to participate in the IEP planning process ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .82$, mode = 4). They also agreed that administrators expect special education students at their grade level to actively participate in transition planning ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.06$, mode = 4). When participants were asked if their school Principal promotes the attendance of all special education students at their IEP meetings, responses were not as positive ($M = 2.81$,

SD = 1.25, mode = 4). But when it was proposed that their school district's policies discourage the active participation of special education students in the IEP planning process, they firmly disagreed (M = 1.68, SD = .92, mode = 1).

On average, participants reported they somewhat agreed that the parents they work with advocate for their children to participate in the transition planning process (M = 2.83, SD = .86, mode = 3). And they generally disagreed with the statement that the parents they work with do not know their children have the right to attend annual IEP meetings (M = 2.09, SD = .97, mode = 1).

Participants generally strongly agreed that students who can make informed choices should be part of the IEP team (M = 3.71, SD = .63, mode = 4). However, they strongly disagreed with the statement that students who cannot communicate choices should not be part of the IEP team (M = 1.28, SD = .68, mode = 1). Also, participants strongly disagreed with the statement that special education students would not benefit from participating in IEP planning sessions and annual meetings before they are 14 years old (M = 3.62, SD = .83, mode = 4).

On average, participants agreed that training sessions are needed to assist special education students to actively participate in the IEP, transition planning and annual meeting process (M = 3.18, SD = .78, mode = 4). On the other hand, the responses were almost identical that participants also agreed teachers need more training for facilitating the participation of students in planning IEPs, developing transition plans, and the annual IEP meeting process (M = 3.18, SD = .89, mode = 4).

TABLE 9. Proportional Distribution of Responses to Student Participation Factors

Statement	Percentage			
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My students are expected to participate in IEP planning	50.0	34.4	12.5	3.1
Administrators expect my students will participate in transition planning.	40.6	37.5	6.3	15.6
Principal(s) promotes attendance of students at their annual IEP meetings.	40.6	28.1	3.1	28.1
School district policies discourage participation of students in IEP process.	3.1	21.9	15.9	59.4
Parents advocate for children to participate in transition planning process.	19.4	54.8	16.1	9.7
Parents I work with do not know children have the right to attend IEP meetings.	6.5	32.3	25.8	35.5
Students who can make informed choices should be part of the IEP team.	78.1	18.8	00.0	3.1
Students who cannot communicate choices should not be on the IEP team	3.1	3.1	12.5	81.3
Students need training to participate in IEP/transition planning and annual meetings.	40.6	37.5	21.9	00.0
Teachers need more training regarding facilitating student participation.	43.8	37.5	12.5	6.3
Students would not benefit from participating in IEP planning and annual meetings before they are 14 years old.	6.3	3.1	12.5	78.1

Quantitative Survey Results Summary

The highest mean for the IEP-related questions was 3.83, indicating that teachers talk with their students sometimes-to-often about the purposes of the IEP before writing it, and the most frequent response to this question was always (mode = 5). Another relatively high mean of 3.50 indicates that students sometimes-to-often know whether they achieved last year's IEP goals, the most frequent response being often (mode = 4). The lowest mean was 2.71, indicating that teachers and other IEP team members rarely-to-sometimes have planning sessions before annual meetings, and the most frequent response was rarely (mode = 2).

The highest mean for the transition-related questions was 4.38, indicating that teachers talk with each student often-to-always about the student's interests before developing a transition plan, and the most frequent response to this question was always (mode = 5). The second highest mean was 4.06, indicating that teachers talk with each student often-to-always about the purposes of a transition plan, with the most frequent response being often (mode = 4). Two other high means of 3.96 and 3.64 indicate that students have opportunities to make decisions in establishing transition plan goals and have input on their transition goals at planning sessions sometimes-to-often respectively. The most frequent response to both of those transition questions was always (mode = 5). The lowest mean was 3.03, indicating that teachers and other staff members and/or service providers only sometimes have transition planning sessions before annual meetings, the most frequent response being sometimes (mode = 3).

The highest mean for the annual meeting questions was 4.31, indicating that most students often-to-always attend their annual IEP meetings, with the most frequent response being always (mode = 5). The second highest mean of 3.59 indicates that students are sometimes-to-often asked questions about their transition plan at the meetings, with the most frequent response being often (mode = 4). The lowest mean was 2.09, indicating that students rarely-to-never lead part or all of their annual meetings, with the most frequent response being never (mode = 1). When asked to rate their school's IEP and transition planning processes, teachers generally said theirs was fair-to-good.

Responses to statements about various factors that may foster and/or suppress student participation of special education students in the IEP/transition planning and annual meeting process were relatively uniform. In general, participants agreed that they have support from their school's administration with the exception of approximately 30% who did not agree that their Principal promotes the attendance of all special education students at IEP meetings. In the area of parent perception, most agreed that parent advocacy for students' participation in transition planning occurs, but approximately 30% agreed that the parents they work with do not know their children have the right to attend annual IEP meetings. Regarding students, participants strongly agreed that students should be on the IEP team, whether or not they can make and communicate choices.

Participants strongly disagreed with the statement that special education students would not benefit from participating in IEP planning sessions and annual

meetings before they are 14 years old. Last, in the area of participant knowledge, there was definite agreement (81%) that teachers need training regarding facilitating student participation in the IEP/transition planning and annual meeting process. They (78%) also felt that students would benefit from such training.

Telephone Interview Responses

Additional data to be reported here include the results of eleven follow-up interviews. The overall purpose of the second part of the data collection was to complement and triangulate the findings from the quantitative data described above. The telephone interviews also served as a validity check for the questionnaire analysis.

The survey questions asked participants to rate various items related to student participation as well as factors that possibly may foster and/or suppress student participation (see Appendix A). The interview questions were then designed to enhance understanding in relation to the low survey modal scores for both student participation at annual IEP meetings and student input at planning sessions (see Appendix B). Responses fell into four overarching categories: teachers' attitudes and knowledge, presumptions regarding students' circumstances, school administration support, and parental awareness (see Table 10).

Teachers' attitudes and knowledge. Multiple responses suggest that teachers believe student participation is very important, and that students would benefit from--and need-- training to enable them to participate. An example of those responses is, "I know it's important for them to be there, but they don't understand the process and they don't participate. So I think there needs to be some sort of training so they

understand what it is that is going on. Otherwise, it is pointless to have them there because they never speak up."

Teacher training is definitely thought to be needed. Here are two examples of their explanations, "I don't think [students] need training. I think they just need to be invited and asked how they are doing and what they need. I don't think the kids need training, I think the teachers do." And, typical of reasons given for that perceived need, "Training for teachers? Yes, I would agree. A lot of the teachers seem to be somewhat apathetic or stay with the basics such as . . . we are going to help you with your skills and that is all they say about it . . . they don't open it up as if [students] have any choices, it's more like this is what it is."

Several themes also emerged during the interviews in regards to factors that suppress student participation. The non-facilitation of student participation contrasted significantly with the multiple responses suggesting that teachers believe student participation is very important. Here is an example, "We expect our kids to be there. Now whether or not that they open their mouth is something else. Yes, we hope that they participate, but they don't."

Multiple responses suggest that teachers believe planning is something done mostly with other professionals and/or parents. Here is an example of that thinking, "An effective way I see is how my boss is doing it . . . he tries to incorporate it into the meetings so that each [IEP] meeting will last about ½ hour--or more as required--at which all the professionals can discuss what is going on, . . . and if everybody feels comfortable with that, it could be left alone, or, if people feel there needs to be more

discussion or more planning, other times can be arranged." Only one teacher responded to the actual question, "Planning sessions should be done with the students. I assume all teachers do that prior to attending the meeting."

Other responses suggest that teachers also generally focus on parent participation--even when they are being asked about student participation and student input at meetings. Here is an example, "I like my students to be there to hear what I have to say. To hear what mom has to say. The only time I like them to be out of the room is when we do talk about behaviors--I think it's too overwhelming for them to hear."

Presumptions regarding students' circumstances. Presumptions about students' situations were subtle undercurrents throughout the interviews. Multiple responses suggest that teachers believe IEP meetings are intimidating to students, that students could participate if they wanted to but that they are passive, and not real clear on what is being talked about. As an example, "They are requested to participate even when they don't volunteer on their own. I think that this is the best we can hope for."

Multiple responses also suggested that some teachers believe the adults know what is best for the students. "I think primarily kids these days follow the lead of the adults because the adults know what is best for them. Some kids have a hard time coming up with something on their own." Running into behavior problems and emotional issues when students are at low functional levels was also predicted by a few teachers who thought decisions need to be made strictly by parents and teachers rather than having those students participate. In this area of presumptions, many indicated

students' level of functioning is a primary factor in their passivity. A few teachers, however, suggested that student participation does not happen because parents and educators do not think students are capable to participate in IEP meetings, let alone to lead them. For example, "I think there is probably an unconscious feeling on the part of the parents and educators that [students] are not really that capable."

Astute teacher insights into some reasons why special education student participation is especially important were made, such as "It is pretty difficult for a child to speak up and say, 'Look, I don't want to do this,' or 'I want this.' when Mom or Dad are saying, 'This is what I want for him or her.' Have they asked [their child] 'Do you want this?'" In a prediction about what benefits could happen as a result of facilitating student participation, one response stood out: "If we can get students to reflect on their own behaviors and their own achievements, and propose ideas and solutions for solving problems and attaining general goals throughout their curriculum, they can take this information and apply it over to an IEP setting or transition plan setting." Additional responses included thoughtful ideas about ways to promote facilitation. Here is an example, "I think if a teacher takes the time in the classroom to do some role playing, let the kids know it's OK for them to speak up on their own behalf, then maybe they would not be so intimidated."

Responses also suggested that teachers felt students would definitely benefit from participating in annual meetings before age 14, and that the meetings would be more positive as a result. Here are two examples of those responses, "It doesn't make much sense to me that, all of a sudden when a kid hits 14, that now we are going to

include them. And in [only] 3 or 4 years they must plan their academic placement and [everything else]" and, "I think kindergartners and 1st graders should go to their meetings. One thing I know [is] the difference in tone. It's very positive. When the student is not there, there is a lot of negativity."

One participant spoke about the issue of stigma and her students with disabilities. It was as if the shame that special education students often report experiencing was an unfamiliar concept, but the teacher dealt with it by communicating openly and involving students in the solution. Here is the teacher's reaction and response to the students:

> I think the biggest shock that I have had is that RSP and special day class children need to have the affirmation that they are not stupid. So often I have had kids who do not try, who give up, and when I tell them how bright they are and all they have is a little glitch that we need to work through . . . The whole class will look up and tell me I am stupid, that the other kids taunt them with 'RSP stands for Really Stupid People.' I don't know how much this would fit into what you are doing, but I think they have a different outlook on school when I explain to them if they were "stupid" they would not qualify for special education services and . . . if we can demonstrate some kind of learning difference, then we can give them the help, and [I tell them] if they take a look around in their classroom, I am sure that they will find there are children who are doing as poorly as they are, but who are not bright and would not qualify for RSP services. I think the biggest disservice in the special education process is that students feel they are not bright. But once they realize that they are a sharp little cookie and just need a little extra help, [that they are] going to be able to express to others 'I know what I need to know in a different way and I can find a way to do it,' boy--they shoot forward!

School administration support. In the area of school administration support, themes of collaboration difficulties and professional boundaries were often mentioned. An example of that line of thinking, "[My first District] was much better at getting parents and students in, they really worked at it. [Where I am now] they give lip

service to it, basically I would say, on 50% of my IEP's, the paperwork just went home without a formal [meeting]; since I am new to the district I do what I am told."

In addition, the lack of designated/facilitated planning time was cited by almost everyone. There were perceptions that the IEP is viewed by administrators as a paperwork process done more for compliance than for students.

Multiple responses suggested that teachers' roles are not clearly defined. As an example of this, "I kept quiet for the first year I taught. Because that is what I [thought I] was supposed to do, I did not know what I could or couldn't say, would I get in trouble if I said this, where are the boundaries, what can I do. Each District has their own rules about things and it would be nice if they had some kind of meeting where things were discussed . . . "

Parental awareness. In the area of parental awareness, the themes included a desire for more and early parent involvement, and a suggestion that parents may also need training about their rights. A few responses suggested that teachers felt parental training regarding student and parent rights would also foster student participation. The need for parents to encourage self-advocacy in their children was referred to, along with the feeling that parents may not urge to have their children involved because, unconsciously, they think students are not capable. When teachers talked about planning with parents, no mention was made of parents wanting their children to also be included. As an example, "Where I am trying to be consistent is with my parents. I don't have formal sit downs . . . sometimes I call on the phone, and that is usually between the parents and me."

Participation "whenever appropriate." Based on the literature review, the researcher also asked how teachers interpret what the term "whenever appropriate" means, referring to the fact that IDEA states the student is to participate in the IEP process whenever appropriate. Multiple responses suggested that it is always appropriate. One teacher felt strongly:

> I don't know how the law interprets it, but I think it's stupid to put together an IEP--to write a document that a child is not going to buy into. I think from the very beginning and straight through to the discussion with the parents. I always thought it was sad to see a child sort of trembling. I think a child should come into an IEP meeting feeling confident that this is about me, this is what I know, this is what I need to know, and this is what we decided we are going to do to get me there.

Only one teacher mentioned telling parents she would like their child to come to an IEP meeting. Her comments were as follows,

> I always ask the parent. I would like to have the student there, and I tell them why and it's important, but it is their option--until the child turns 18--to decline if they choose. My experience is that 99% of my parents choose to have their child there. Only one parent [has] felt that hearing the testing scores or information from teachers might be negative for their child to hear . . .

Qualitative Interview Themes Summary

In the area of planning, most responses suggested participants firmly believe that student participation is important, and perceive a need for more planning. However, they equate planning as something that is done mostly with other professionals and/or parents rather than with students. Multiple responses regarding current planning practices indicated that, on average, if it is done, it takes place in the IEP meeting rather than in a pre-meeting planning session. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that the concept of "formal" pre-IEP planning sessions

may be impractical, but that using discretionary time for ongoing informal planning with students and other involved staff has worked for some teachers. These participants also suggested having mock IEP meetings, transition workshops, andusing the IEP as a working document. As an example of this thinking, "What I do think would be real helpful in transition planning would be to have a workshop. Students need to learn how to speak up for themselves, and know when it's appropriate. They need to become self-advocates. And know what they are entitled to."

Almost all participants' responses indicated teachers feel student participation is important, as well as teacher training to learn about facilitating participation. The need for student training was strongly supported, and it was mentioned in participants' responses to all of the questions, not just the question about training. Responses also overwhelmingly indicated that most teachers believe students would benefit from participating in the IEP process before age 14.

TABLE 10. Factors Fostering/Suppressing Special Education Student Participation

Teachers' Attitudes and Knowledge

Factors that Foster Participation	Factors that Suppress Participation
Believe student participation is important	Equate participation mainly with parents
Perceive a need for more planning	Plan mostly with professionals and/or parents
Ongoing informal planning with students and staff	Believe behavior should not be discussed in front of students
Some use IEP as a working document	Do not expect or facilitate student input and participation
Feel teachers would benefit from training	

Presumptions Regarding Students' Circumstances

Factors that Foster Participation	Factors that Suppress Participation
Believe would benefit from training	Level of awareness is a passivity factor
Believe would benefit from IEP involvement before age 14	Assume students are intimidated/uninterested
Believe participation always appropriate and results in more positive meetings	Not perceived as capable to lead/participate in IEP meetings

School Administration Support

Factors that Foster Participation	Factors that Suppress Participation
Districts that support planning	Collaboration difficulties unresolved
Districts that expect participation	Professional boundaries unclear
	Lack of facilitated planning time
	View IEP as paperwork for compliance
	Pay lip-service to parent participation

Parental Awareness

Factors that Foster Participation	Factors that Suppress Participation
May need training about children's rights	Do not promote children's participation and decision making
	Do not encourage self-advocacy
	Do not discuss/encourage future goals

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study were threefold: (1) to assess the current level and quality of students' participation in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings, (2) to investigate the extent to which teachers expect and enable special education students to participate in that process, and (3) to identify factors that may foster and/or suppress the participation of special education students in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings using multiple methodologies in an attempt to understand the perspectives of teachers in the field.

Though some studies suggest that student participation has been limited, few recent studies have investigated whether the student participation problems noted in the literature still exist and--if they do--why. Also, few studies have directly assessed which of the factors suggested in the literature are actually fostering and/or suppressing participation. The lack of current information is particularly important to address in light of the recent revisions to IDEA mandating increased student participation. This study adds to that data base and provides a timely foundation for discussion of the themes that emerged: teachers' attitudes and knowledge, presumptions regarding students' circumstances, school administration support, and parental awareness. It also contributes to the literature perspectives of teachers who are working in the special

education field by identifying and assessing participating educators' current experiences, opinions, beliefs and resultant practices regarding their facilitation of student participation.

The study's survey questions were drafted using key concepts that the literature identified as important ingredients for facilitating student participation in both the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings. Because the questions represent practices that are important ingredients for facilitating student participation, the frequent use of these practices would suggest that the field has come a long way from the limited participation opportunities typically reported in the literature. However, though 38.7% of the participants answered "always" when asked if they talk with students about both the IEP and transition plan purposes, only 16.7% or less said students have opportunities to "always" have input, make choices and decisions in the IEP process. There does appear to be a trend toward more students having input and making decisions in their transition planning process, with the "always" responses being more than 32%. This is an encouraging trend in transition planning, but only 16.7% of the participants reported that they "always" have either IEP or transition planning sessions.

Survey responses to questions regarding annual meetings indicated that, though 64.5% of the students do attend their annual meetings, few students discuss, report on their progress, or ask questions at those meetings. When the questionnaire asked about factors that may foster or suppress student participation, 50% of the survey participants strongly agreed that their students are expected to participate in IEP planning. In

addition, 40.6% of the participants felt that administrators and Principals expect students to participate in transition planning as well as attend annual meetings, and 59.4% of the participants felt that their school district policies did not discourage participation of students. These responses were in contrast to other survey questions about planning sessions in which participants indicated that few planning sessions take place.

The telephone interview questions were drafted to further examine the reasons behind the survey responses, which indicated limited student participation at annual meetings and limited involvement in planning sessions. The interviews added significantly to understanding the survey responses.

From the interviews, it appears that the function of the annual IEP meeting and students' role in that meeting are unclear. Many participants reported that the IEP meeting is a primary venue for planning students' education. However, most also said they write the IEP prior to the meeting, which brings into question how much planning actually occurs at the meetings. The few mentions of planning prior to the meetings further suggest an overall limited occurrence of planning. Further concern arises from participants reporting that few students know if they have achieved their IEP goals and objectives. If students have limited information in this area, it leads one to question how well they can actively contribute to discussions about future goals and objectives.

Many of the teachers interviewed perceived a need for more planning, but did not see how key staff members could manage taking time to attend another meeting. The difficulty of getting parents to attend meetings was also mentioned. This suggests

that planning is primarily viewed as something teachers do with other professionals and parents, not with students. The current practice of primarily equating participation in the IEP process with parent participation does reflect practices that have been emphasized in the special education field. However, when teachers were asked how more student participation could be facilitated, the responses were excellent. Responses included such suggestions as having ongoing informal planning with students, having mock IEP meetings, transition planning workshops, and using the IEP as a working document with the students. Many expressed the opinion that making additional efforts to plan with students on a one-on-one basis would not only be practical, but potentially beneficial to both students and teachers.

Though teachers overwhelmingly expressed a belief that student participation in planning and at IEP meetings is important, they also reported that facilitation of student participation was not occurring. A number of factors that may be suppressing student participation were explained in the interviews. Responses reflected that the teachers interviewed were unclear about their role as facilitators' of active student participation. This confusion was indicated in terms of insecurities expressed by participants regarding what teachers can do--or cannot do--in relation to the authority of other professionals involved, as well as what their own authority boundaries are at meetings.

It also became clear that some teachers felt students were intimidated at meetings. Others said students either were not interested, or were passive because they think that is their expected role at meetings. Some teachers expressed a belief that students with severe disabilities are passive because they are incapable of participation

even though the survey results indicated that 81% of the participants felt that students who cannot communicate choices should still be on the IEP team. Since the teachers interviewed reported that their students, for the most part, attend annual meetings without participating, perhaps the questionnaire responses also reflect that attitudes and/or limited information about how to best assist students in making choices and actively contributing to their IEP. Teachers talked in terms of "hoping" for students to participate, but did not report practices that would actively facilitate it.

The perceived need for more teacher training in the area of facilitating student participation, as well as training for students, was mentioned throughout the interviews. It was obvious that these were very caring individuals who, though some perceived students as not capable of participation, all felt students would benefit from training and learning how to participate. It was clear that these teachers felt students would benefit if they participated in the IEP process and meetings when they were younger, rather than beginning participation at age 14. The responses validated survey results, which indicated the need for training and early student participation in the IEP process.

According to the teachers interviewed, the parents these teachers work with do not promote their children's participation in the IEP process and, instead, seem to go along with their children's passive participation. This, too, was an indication that school districts may not be informing parents of their rights or their children's rights. A few teachers felt that parents would also benefit from training in the importance of children with disabilities developing self-advocacy skills.

This study strongly indicates that the teachers who participated are headed in the right direction, but that school district personnel as well as the parents would benefit from training about the importance of student participation and planning. It does not appear that the systemic problems reported are insurmountable. It appears that, if educators had as a common goal the empowerment of students through participation in planning their educational program and were provided with information on effective strategies to achieve that goal, it could be achieved regardless of the systemic barriers.

Implications of the Study

The results of the study indicate that, 1) participating special education teachers think their students as well as the teachers themselves need training in order to participate and/or facilitate effective participation of students in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings, 2) educators would benefit if their role was more clearly defined as a facilitator of active student participation, and 3) IDEA needs to redefine and emphasize active student participation, as the phrase "whenever appropriate" in the law appears to be narrowly interpreted, which belies the multiple benefits of facilitating student participation at an early age.

The findings also indicate a need to concentrate on closing the research-to-practice gap in the areas of the multiple benefits that result from facilitating meaningful student participation in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings. Providing an opportunity for students to participate is not enough. Providing the tools and practice they need to become effective participants must also occur. During the

last two decades, many studies, reviews and critiques of the IEP/transition planning process have resulted in the development of various model programs, guidelines and/or curriculum strategies that have been successfully used by educators to facilitate active student participation have been successfully used by educators to facilitate active student participation (Battle, Dickens-Wright & Murphy, 1998; Hoy, 1986; Phillips, 1990; Schunk, 1985; Kohn, 1993; Martin & Marshall, 1996; Martin, Marshall, Maxson & Jerman, 1996; Smith & Brownell, 1995; Van Reusen & Bos, 1994; Wehmeyer, & Lawrence, 1995; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995). However, though the data and multiple models exist, teachers do not appear to be knowledgeable about their availability, or--as described earlier--their attitudes interfere with their use. Increased efforts appear to be needed to disseminate and promote school districts' and educators' awareness of the model programs and curriculum strategies that special education researchers have developed for students to increase and facilitate student participation.

As Kohn (1993) perceptively acknowledged:

> Helping students to participate effectively takes talent and patience and hard work. "I'm in control of putting students in control," one teacher told [Kohn]--[a] responsibility that demands more of an educator than simply telling students what to do. (p. 15)

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations must be noted as they are worthy of examination in future research. The sample was small and varied in terms of level of training and years of experience as noted in Chapter 3 (see Tables 1 & 2). The study did not directly examine the impact of varied levels of training and years of experience due to the

sample size. Extraneous variables may have affected the administration of the questionnaire and consent to participate. Because the researcher is a wheelchair-user, the in-class procedures were arranged to the conducted by a nondisabled research assistant to avoid possible experimenter effect. Due to scheduling conflicts, the researcher administered the questionnaire for one class. To accommodate class schedules and be flexible in regard to faculty preferences, the questionnaire was sometimes administered at class break time and sometimes after class. Absences may have influenced participation. It is worthy to note that all participants were students in the same graduate program. Their responses may therefore be reflective of that program rather than of responses of teachers as a whole. Participant responses may also be reflective of their status as students, and therefore different from teachers not involved in ongoing training. Each of these limitations and their possible influence on the results as presented here are worthy of attention in future research.

Suggestions for Future Research

Noting the limitations, confirming these results by surveying and talking with a larger number of teachers in a variety of settings may be indicated. Also, future research could determine whether similar factors and experiences would be identified by teachers who work with students in specific categories of disabilities. Further, institutes of higher education could make use of the questionnaire as a program evaluation tool. By using a version of the study's questionnaire as a pre-and post-test instrument for certain courses, preservice teachers' attitudes and student participation

knowledge base could be measured. However, anonymity and confidentiality is recommended to maximize validity of the responses, which was important in this study.

Conclusion

The literature demonstrates that children and adolescents benefit from having choices, making decisions, and learning specific skills such as problem solving, identifying consequences, as well as identifying alternative strategies, by participating at school, at home, and elsewhere. Clearly, these documented benefits have not resulted in special education students' widespread participation in the planning of their IEP and post-school transition. In this area, there is an overwhelming need for increased parent and professional collaboration to facilitate more active participation of students in their IEP and transition planning processes. The inclusion of students in an educational planning procedure that was designed expressly for them by law is still an often overlooked component of their special education programs. Numerous possibilities exist at various stages and to different degrees for student participation in the IEP/transition planning process and annual meetings. This study suggests that the field still has a way to go in taking advantage of those possibilities.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

IEP QUESTIONNAIRE

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IEP QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey looks at the Individualized Education Program (IEP), transition planning and annual meeting process. The purpose is to learn from people in the field about practices, experiences, opinions and beliefs. Some questions may seem redundant, which is due to my desire to learn about both the IEP as well as its transition plan component, and there are some who handle them as distinctly separate processes.

I. Survey Questions

NEXT TO EACH QUESTION, MARK THE NUMBER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PRACTICES

	Always [5]	Often [4]	Sometimes [3]	Rarely [2]	Never [1]
In preparing a student's IEP . . .					
1. Before writing the IEP, do you talk with your students about the purposes of their IEP?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
2. Before writing an IEP, do you talk with your students about their strengths?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
3. Do you and members of the IEP team have IEP planning sessions before annual meetings?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
4. Do your students provide input on their IEP goals at IEP team planning sessions?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
5. Do your students have opportunities to make choices in establishing their IEP goals?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
6. Do you write the IEP before annual meetings?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
In developing a student's transition plan . . .					
7. Before developing a transition plan, do you talk with your students about its purposes?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
8. Before developing a transition plan, do you talk with each student about his or her interests?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
9. Do your students have opportunities to make decisions in establishing their transition plan goals?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
10. Do you, other staff members and/or service providers have transition planning sessions before annual meetings?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
11. Do your students have input on their transition goals at transition planning sessions?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
12. Do you write the transition plan before the annual IEP meeting?	[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]

NEXT TO EACH QUESTION,
MARK THE NUMBER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PRACTICES:

Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
[5]	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]

At annual IEP and transition meetings . . .

13. Do your students attend their annual IEP meetings? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

14. Do students lead part or all of their annual IEP meeting? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

15. At the annual meeting, do students discuss or indicate how their IEP goals relate to their own strengths? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

16. At the annual meeting, do students report on their progress toward achieving their IEP goals? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

17. Are your students asked questions about their IEP at annual meetings? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

18. Do your students ask questions at annual IEP meetings? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

19. At the annual meeting, do students discuss or indicate how their transition goals relate to their own interests? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

20. At the annual meeting, do students report on their progress toward achieving their transition goals? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

21. Are your students asked questions about their transition plan at annual meetings? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

In general . . .

22. Do your students know if they achieved last year's IEP goals? [5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

---

23. How do you rate the process used at your school for planning, developing and writing IEPs?
Indicate by checking (only) one: [4] Excellent [3] Good [2] Fair [1] Poor
Please explain and/or comment:

_____

_____

24. How do you rate the process used at your school for planning, developing and writing transition plans?
Indicate by checking (only) one: [4] Excellent [3] Good [2] Fair [1] Poor
Please explain and/or comment:

_____

_____

Next, your personal opinions and beliefs about student participation in the IEP and its transition component are being sought. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following related factors by marking one of these numbers next to each statement:

Strongly Agree [4]	Somewhat Agree [3]	Somewhat Disagree [2]	Strongly Disagree [1]

25. My students are expected to participate in the IEP planning process.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
26. My school principal(s) promotes the attendance of all special education students at their annual IEP meetings.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
27. The parents I work with advocate for their children to participate in the transition planning process.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
28. Administrators expect that special education students at my grade level will actively participate in transition planning.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
29. Students who cannot communicate choices should not be part of the IEP team.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
30. Training sessions are needed to assist special education students to actively participate in their IEP, transition planning process and annual meetings.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
31. My School District's policies discourage the active participation of ~~all~~ special education students in the IEP planning process.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
32. The parents I work with do not know that their children have the right to attend the annual IEP meetings.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
33. Students who can make informed choices should be part of the IEP team.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
34. Teachers need more training regarding facilitating the participation of students in preparing IEPs, developing transition plans, and the annual IEP meeting process.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
35. Special education students would not benefit from participating in their IEP planning sessions and annual meetings before they are 14 years old.	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]

36. Other opinions or beliefs you have about student participation:

_____

_____

_____

_____

II. General Information

A. What is your age: [1] 20 - 25 [2] 26 - 30 [3] 31 - 40 [4] 41 - 50 [5] 50 +

B. What is your gender? [1]male [2]female

C. What is the highest degree and/or certification level you hold?

_____Year Received:_____

D. What are your educational objectives at CSULB? (e.g. degree, credential)_____

_____

E. How many IEP team planning sessions have you attended:

[1] None [2] 1 - 10 [3] 11 - 20

[4] 21 - 30 [5] 31 - 40 [6] 40+

F. How many annual IEP meetings have you attended:

[1] 0 - 25 [2] 26 - 75 [3] 76 - 125

[4] 126 - 175 [5] 176 +

G. Currently, what is the school level where you work?

[1] Junior high (middle, intermediate)

[2] High school (9-12 or 10-12)

[3] Other _____

H. Do you primarily work in: [1] one school [2] several schools

[3] hospital or institutional setting(s)

[4] home settings

I. If you work for a school district, is it:

[1] urban [2] suburban

[3] rural [4] other

_____

J. How many years have you worked in general education:

[1] 1 - 5 [2] 6 - 10

[3] 11 - 15 [4] 16 - 20 [5] 20+

IF YOU ARE CURRENTLY A GENERAL EDUCATION...teacher ☐ or paraeducator ☐

1-j. What is the average number of students in your general education class(es)? _____

2-j. How many of those students are identified as special education students? _____

3-j. What are the ages of your students? _____

4-j. At what grade level(s) do you work? _____

K How many years have you worked in special education:

[1] 1 - 5 [2] 6 - 10

[3] 11 - 15 [4] 16 - 20 [5] 20+

IF YOU ARE CURRENTLY A SPECIAL EDUCATION... teacher ☐ or paraeducator ☐

1-k. Do you primarily work as

[1] a resource specialist [2] an inclusion specialist

[3] a resource room teacher [4] a special day class (SDC) teacher

[5] other _____

2-k. How many students (total) are in your caseload, resource room or SDC? _____

3-k. What are the ages of your students? _____

4-k. At what grade level(s) do you work? _____

L. Please indicate which classification(s) of students you work with:

[1] Autistic	[6] Mentally Retarded	[11] Speech and Language Impaired
[2] Deaf	[7] Multiply Handicapped	[12] Specific Learning Disability
[3] Deaf-Blind	[8] Orthopedically Impaired	[13] Traumatic Brain Injury
[4] Emotionally Disturbed	[9] Other Health Impaired	[14] Visually Impaired
[5] Hard of Hearing	[10]Other:_____	

Developed by: Dianne B. Piastro THANK YOU !

APPENDIX B

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

CONFIDENTIAL

Telephone Interview Protocol

Hello, this is Dianne Piastro; on _____(date) you completed a Questionnaire for the thesis research I am doing for my Master's in Special Education at California State University, Long Beach. When you signed the Research Consent Form, you agreed to do a follow-up telephone interview in June for the study's second stage, which will take approximately 30 minutes. Do you still agree to do so?

If no, thank individual for completing the original survey.
If yes, ask if this is a good time to do the interview....
If no, make arrangements to call back.
If yes, continue.....

As indicated on the Research Consent Form you signed, your identity will be kept confidential. The interview will be audio-taped; you can review and edit the transcription of the tape before I add it to the study - do you want to do that?

If yes, make arrangements to do so before continuing.
If no, continue.....

I would like to start the interview by learning a little about you.....

1. Age:
2. Position:
3. Years you have worked with special education students:

In answering the following questions, I am interested in gaining insight into and an understanding of your feelings, and what you believe.

4. The survey results indicate that students almost always attend their annual IEP meetings, but that students rarely or never lead part or all of those meetings and rarely discuss or report on their IEP or transition goals.

What do you think about this reported role of students at annual meetings?

Probing questions:

a. In your opinion, do you think students should play different roles than are reported?
   If no, go to question 5.....
   If yes, continue.....
b. Why do you think they aren't playing different roles?
c. How could we facilitate students playing different roles?
d. Are such ideas ever discussed in staff meetings or informally?

5. The survey results indicate that most teachers talk with their students about the purposes of their IEP and transition plan, but that the IEP team only sometimes or rarely has planning sessions.

To what do you attribute the low incidence of planning sessions?

Probing questions:

a. Do you think planning sessions are needed?
   If no, go to question 6.....
   If yes, continue.....
b. What do you think would facilitate having planning sessions?
c. Are such ideas ever discussed in staff meetings or informally?

---

6. The survey results indicate that students are expected to participate in the IEP planning process, and that, for the most part, school district policies encourage the active participation of all special education students in the IEP planning process.

To what do you attribute the survey responses that indicate students only sometimes, or rarely, participate, have choices or input in the IEP planning process? [q 4, 5]

---

7. Survey respondents indicated that training is needed to assist special education students and teachers regarding active student participation in IEP and transition planning and annual meetings. If you agree, can you be more specific?

8. Survey respondents felt students would benefit from participating in IEP planning sessions and annual meetings before age 14; what do you think and why?

9. IDEA specifies which individuals must participate on the IEP Team and the law states that the student is to be on the IEP Team whenever appropriate. How do you interpret what the term "whenever appropriate" means? [researcher question]

10. Would you like to elaborate on any of the answers you have given me?

11. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to add?

Thank you!!

By Dianne B. Piastro

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

My name is Dianne Piastro; I am a candidate for the Master's of Science in Special Education at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). If you are a graduate student who also is employed as a teacher (or paraeducator) working with special education pupils age 14 or older, you are invited to participate in my research study. I want to hear from individuals in the field about their IEP/ transition plan practices, experiences, opinions and beliefs. The results will contribute significantly to my thesis: "Participation of Special Education Students in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process."

If you volunteer to participate in the study, you will be asked to 1) complete the questionnaire distributed to you, which will take approximately 15 minutes, and 2) consider the option of also doing a follow-up telephone interview in June for the study's second stage, which will take approximately 30 minutes.

You may withdraw at any time without negative consequences of any kind. The study involves no foreseen risks. However, if you experience distress or if any of the questions are unclear, you may leave blank or choose not to answer any question you don't want to answer.

Your name cannot be linked to the questionnaire (it is deposited into a sealed box); if you also agree to the telephone interview, your identity will be kept confidential (only the researcher will know your name). The telephone interview will be audio-taped and transcribed by a typist not connected with CSULB. You have the right to review/edit the tape, and may request this at your interview. The tapes will be erased after the transcription has been reviewed. When the study results are reported, your name will not be revealed.

Although you will not directly benefit from participating in this study, the benefits are the contribu=-tions it will make to empirical data about the IEP / transition process in the field of special education.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at (562) 421-3644, or my thesis advisor, Dr. Jennifer Coots at (562) 985-8354. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, call the Office of University Research, (562) 985- 5314.

Upon completion of this RESEARCH CONSENT FORM and the IEP QUESTIONNAIRE, you will deposit each document into a sealed box. At that time, participants will be given a $5.00 UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE gift certificate and a blank copy of this consent form by the person who is administering the study for me. If you agree to participate in this study at this time, please print and sign your name and the date below.

Name of Participant (PRINT)_____

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

OPTIONAL: I also agree to participate in a 30-minute follow-up telephone interview ☐ :

_____ _____

Area code and Telephone number

Best day and time to call me: ☐ a.m. ☐ p.m.

Best week(s) in the month of June, 2000, to call:

☐ 1st week ☐ 2nd week

☐ Please send me a summary of the research findings:

_____

Street Address City, State and Zip Code

APPENDIX D

IEP QUESTIONNAIRE:

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS

ON QUESTIONS 23, 24 AND 36

IEP Questionnaire: Additional Comments of Subjects
on Questions 23, 24 and 36

QUESTION 23. How do you rate the process used at your school for planning, developing and writing IEPs? [4]Excellent [3] Good [2] Fair [1] Poor (M = 2.68) Please explain or comment:

[4]- EXCELLENT

I work at a state developmental center. The students now get to attend their IEP, which sets a more positive tone. Many specialists attend. Much input.

IEPs: All are pre-planned (w/ten days notice), lots of collaboration.

I chose excellent because it's my process.

The student is always involved - to promote self advocacy and choice is important. Regional center administration is choice driven.

[3]- GOOD

Most students don't participate in their IEP because of their cognitive status.

Could be better, hard to get parents in.

The school is a N P.S (non-public school) in a residential facility, there are many factors: if the student remains at the facility for years or if only have them there for a few months.

Thorough process and involvement (middle school)

We do our best to make parents feel welcome and part of the meeting.

Need to write short-term objectives/benchmarks also.

Collaboration w/ administrations, parents, related service, students good

The hardest part in planning an IEP is finding a common time to hold it so that all persons involved, including at least one general educator, are able to attend. In addition not all parents take the time to attend your child's I.E.P. meeting every year.

We are a collaborative model and general education teachers are very involved in the process.

Prior to IEP I consult with student regarding the next years goals.

Process could be improved.

[2]-FAIR

I think sometimes new teachers do not have enough training.

There is no formal process. Special Ed at my school just does what they need to do. Administrators attend, but not really a participant.

Many times administrators and especially general education instructors are unavailable for these meetings.

Non-public school, not a lot of leadership and organization at meetings.

I have found it's an individual process-- as a new teacher, I ask questions

I would have liked to have seen more student participation as well as other direct staff involvement.

Not a strong Special Ed department.

We use team planning, very open and helpful

Not enough time for planning as a team.

[1]-POOR

In the planning process it usually involves only the special education teacher and parents. It is difficult to get anybody to participate.

Until recently we couldn't obtain the necessary support from the service related staff. However, now with new people at the helm, this is changing fast -- more compliant focused efforts.

QUESTION 24. How do you rate the process used at your school for planning, developing and writing transition plans?
[4]Excellent [3] Good [2] Fair [1] Poor (M = 2.53) Please explain or comment:

[4]- EXCELLENT
(no comments were made)

[3]- GOOD
I have noticed that there are times when parents make the major decisions on what (they want) their child is going to do after high school. Often times, they come up with unrealistic goals
The therapists are included in planning as well as students
Good communication between middle school and high school
Seems routine for the most part, but an expert does an interview and makes a report.
Could be better, hard to get parents in.
We have a full-time RSP person for transition and a vocational education person.
Students are actively involved.
It depends on the particular teacher/class, but more planning/preparation need to be included, especially involvement of the students.
Process could be improved.
We use team planning, very open and helpful.

[2]-FAIR
This is done as the joint effort with high school.
Could use interagency collaboration for improvement
Our plan involves asking parents what they are looking for, writing down in the IEP. There is not much structure or input from professionals.
Collaboration with administrations, parents, related service, students is good
IEP team members are not given adequate time to attend meetings and participate in planning.
Inexperience would be the key term. I worked at a middle school and S. D. C students are 14 due to being held back. I do many--they haven't had the opportunity
Not enough time for planning as a team.
When everyone involved agrees and promotes client choice, transition plans are great. The adverse does occur.

[1]-POOR
None exists.
In the planning process it usually involves only the special education teacher and parents. It is difficult to get anybody to participate.

QUESTION 36. Other opinions or beliefs you have about student participation:

The questions did a good job in my opinion.

Some of these questions need explaining so please call.

At the middle school level, I don't believe it is (most of the time) in their best interest.

If talking about student (with or in front of) if student gets upset or is set off, they should not go.

Students should always be encouraged and coached to participate.

At our facility we appreciate the interest the student shows in his own education. We also always use the opportunity to support and encourage the student.

Students need to have a voice in deciding on their goals and objectives.

Students must always participate.

It is a must to have a student participate in a meeting where his own personal and educational goals are discussed. An IEP is all about the students, so he should be there at the meeting.

Students should be more involved in the IEP process

Students who are active participants & contributors to decision-making are empowered to become more independent and to continue making choices.

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